



AARE Theory Workshop, June 16-17, 2017

Organised in conjunction with the *Qualitative Research Methodologies SIG* and *Arts Education Practice and Research SIG*.

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Storied, slow, aesthetic, relational: A wabi-sabi¹ approach to doing and writing 'research'

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Our research journeys often begin in ways that connect with the concept of wabi-sabi: “the art of imperfection” (Lawrence, 2001). This may seem to be in contradiction to all things associated with the acts of doing and writing ‘research’. However, in this workshop we highlight the value of wabi-sabi for negotiating the demands of the often sterile and sterilising contemporary university:

Broadly, wabi-sabi is everything that today’s sleek, mass-produced, technology-saturated culture isn’t. It’s flea markets, not shopping malls; aged wood, not swank floor coverings; one single morning glory, not a dozen red roses. Wabi-sabi understands the tender, raw beauty of a gray December landscape and the aching elegance of an abandoned building or shed. It celebrates cracks and crevices and rot and all the other marks that time and weather and use leave behind. To discover wabi-sabi is to see the singular beauty in something that may first look decrepit and ugly...Wabi-sabi reminds us that we are all transient beings on this planet—that our bodies, as well as the material world around us, are in the process of returning to dust. Nature’s cycles of growth, decay, and erosion are embodied in frayed edges, rust, liver spots. Through wabi-sabi, we learn to embrace both the glory and the melancholy found in these marks of passing time. (Lawrence, 2001)

Wabi-sabi asks us to re-consider views about ‘what matters’ within the sometimes hard and cruel spaces of the contemporary university where our bodies are subjected to the violence of the ‘publish or perish’ mantra. For this is a mantra that positions us against each other—we compare and compete, and we push and pull our bodies to live up to the demands made upon us. We secretly count up our outputs to ensure that we will ‘count’ when the ‘counting’ is done. We work on grant application after grant application in the hope of winning that all elusive research dollar. Because if don’t we will not count when the counting is done. But, sometimes serendipity and magic occurs in research spaces. The unintentional, the imperfect, the humble become sites for listening and responding to what research is and can be, and who researchers are and can be. This has been our experience, and this workshop emerges from our learning and becoming ‘the women who write’ <http://www.thewomenhowrite.com/>.

Taking a wabi-sabi approach to research, this workshop will challenge you to think beyond such binaries as ‘publish or perish’ to explore aesthetic and paradoxical notions of research and research processes. You will be asked to connect to your ability to slow down, to shift the balance from doing to being, and to appreciating rather than

¹ Lawrence, R. (2001, September-October). Wabi-Sabi: The Art Of Imperfection. UTNE Reader. Retrieved from: <http://www.utne.com/mind-and-body/wabi-sabi>



perfecting (Lawrence, 2001). Nestled in theories of embodiment, affect, materiality and desire we will be deliberately/promiscuously (Childers et al, 2013) breaking the rules and exploring the cracks and chips of our lived experiences and engaging in kintsugi-like golden repair using constructs of slow scholarship and story. This workshop offers space for contemplation, listening and responding—inviting reflection on the theories that resonate, the nature of relational research, and ethics of caring in research worlds.